

*Cecily.* Oh, no! I live here.

*Gwendolen.* [*Severely.* ~\ Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

*Cecily.* Oh, no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations,

*Gwendolen.* Indeed?

*Cecily.* My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

*Gwendolen.* Your guardian?

*Cecily.* Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

*Gwendolen.* Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [*Rising and going to her.*] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly

*Cecily.* Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

*Gwendolen.* Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong, upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

*Cecily.* I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

*Gwendolen.* Yes.

*Cecily.* Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

*Gwendolen.* [*Sitting down again.*] Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

*Cecily.* I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

*Gwendolen.* Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I trifly of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious.